

Going With Carl Hertel To See 56 Chinese Paintings In
Pasadena: Three Poems

1: Consort Ming Crossing The Frontier by Kung Su-jan

cold wind off the high desert a carved p'i-p'a shaggy ponies
Tu Fu wrote about her, a shih

'sierras, valleys, ravines, at last the mountain Ch'u Gateway
the village is still here where lady Ming Fei grew up

the red brick terraces behind her, desert stretched to the
north
a green grave mound remains alone in the dusk

paintings remember her face under spring winds
jade ornaments tinkle her ghost troubles the moonlit night

a thousand years the tatar lute has spoken
as if its alien melodies told her wrongs'

Wang Shao-chün Shō kun in Japanese the
loveliest lady
relied on beauty alone
while the three hundred others bribed the painter

2: Pavilion In An Autumn Landscape by Ni Tsan

Ni Tsan his dry stingy brush
several trees
a bleak stretch of water
dirt hills not far off
a pavilion
nobody in it
over and over
he didn't like people if they were vulgar
collected antiquities, calligraphy
but left his possessions
lived wandering amidst lakes and streams
was not present when the Yüan went under
he couldn't stand not being clean
enjoyed: 'a relatively tranquil old age'

3: Patio Mural by Robert Rauschenberg

I used to wash the windows in Running Springs
the Wagon Wheel Cafe
lifting up carefully the neon sign
to sponge glass behind it
hot vinegar water cut

fly specks, smoke film, dust, then
deftly I plied the squeegee, carefully
let the sign back down \$200 sign even then ACME
beer cans with cone tops capped like bottles
later in the war patriotic quarts
to save metal Lucky Strike Green gone to war then too
outside on the stoop great oaken barrels, the empties
fifty gallons or so of draught beer
I remember how thick the staves were
doubly curved four
iron hoops fit to the bulge
the bung replaced, loosely
there was lettering carved or burnt deeply in the
wood
I forget what
you can't get beer in wooden barrels anywhere any more
Robert Rauschenberg
how come they still have neon

-- R G Barnes

Claremont CA

The Phenomenologist

Bald and silent
a thin, ascetic man
he was one of the ten
disciples of P.
taking the path of phenomenologist
up the dim and seedy cliffs of 20th
century philosophy.

The sun of La Jolla baked
the rest of them
in their ambition but he was fair
and liked the shade.

He did not contend.
He made no defense of anything.

He kept
his contemplations in a pile
of little notebooks
arranged in order
on a shabby one drawer desk.

Now ten years have passed.
I suppose the rest are all professors now.